

Football, Cider and Tape Recorders. Amebix on the Arise Tour, Manchester, November 1985.

Alastair 'Gords' Gordon.

From 1984-6 we used to hang around at band practices at The Nottingham Queens Walk Community Centre. These practices were usually on a Friday and a microcosm of what would later be some of the key bands in the UK hardcore scene. Bands such as Concrete Sox, Heresy and others used to practice regularly with a small audience of local punks. These were great times and I got to meet a few people who I'm still in bands with to this day. Most notably, Kalv and Steve who were then of Heresy and Victim, John March of Concrete Sox. Also a frequent visitor to the practices was Digby Pearson later founder of Earache records. Other visitors were Chaos UK and Disorder. Gabba, the guitarist of Chaos UK had left the Nottingham scum punks Seats of Piss to join them. Late that summer I overheard Gabba and Chaos talking about how good the new Amebix record sounded. I was a massive fan of the band and missed their earlier Nottingham gigs so they were an enigma to me. Beyond their first track on Crass label *Bullshit Detector* rough and ready compilation record, their first two 7" records *Who's the Enemy?* and *Winter* and the awesome *No Sanctuary* 12" ep. Even back then this band were certainly different to the anarcho punk output with songs about talking that early Killing Joke sound and applying it to accounts of madness, human factory farming and non vegetarian ideals. This set them off in a block of their own. I couldn't wait to see them and this time they were doing the record for the Dead Kennedys label, Alternative Tentacles. From the sounds the studio gossip it was gonna be a good one.

When the record was finally released I wasn't disappointed. It was fucking groundbreaking and it was love at first listen. The bleak soundscape of songs like 'Axeman, Largactyl and Fear of God' broke new ground. It was a record that was not without controversy back then. Too slow for the punks and too non metallic for the 'metallars' it kept the band in a marginal status that would take a few years for them to be fully recognised as original trailblazers of what would later become the 'crust' genre. The artwork was stark, and in keeping of their earlier records though the colour sleeve and scary images of a half zombie punk 'arising' surrounded by a symbol was sinister. I traced that picture and put it on my bedroom door. At the time I was just living at home and spending a lot of time at my mate's squat in Mapperley. My father came back from his job abroad, saw the picture on the door and tore it up, accusing me of being into a load of pointless 'communist nonsense'. That was one of the last times I stayed in the family home and it's safe to say I never got on with, or had that much respect for my right wing father. Anyway, from that time I went Amebix (and US hardcore mad) getting my mate Al, who was a great artist, to paint the Amebix logo on the back of my denim cut-off, a symbol now tattooed on the inside of my left forearm.

My good mate Tim had found out that Amebix were playing in Manchester. If fine Notts tradition we boarded the '252 transpeak bus one a November evening, each with a two litre bottle of cider and proceeded to get drunk at the back of the bus. I remember us being joined by some wino, who'd sniffed out our supply of drink and regaled us with half-mumbled tales of his wasted life. This bus had no stops between from start to finish and no comfy bog to relive the drinking. We pissed in plastic bags tying them up tight at the top. I remember the intermittent street lights of the peak district winding roads reflecting off the pissbags. They rolled in time with the twists and turns of the route. Our drunk friend disembarked somewhere near Buxton and we again juddered off to our punk destination. The bus meandered for what seemed like an age and by the time we found the venue the support bands had already been on.

By this point I was a massive fan of taking my tape recorder to gigs and capturing the live sound of lots of events back then. This event was no exception. I'd brought up my trusty ghetto blaster (with an ace 7 Seconds sticker I'd gotten of Kalv back then), got new batteries and a fresh 'shoplifted' metal/chrome tape to capture the moment. I'd hear that the Amebix were tall so I instantly spotted Robb and Stigg out from the shorter punk crowd. Slightly nervous but buoyed on by the cider journey I asked if it's be okay to tape the show. "No problem" was the response, "you can even sit by the side of the stage if you want". I was chuffed. The band were nearly ready to go on and I grabbed a rickety chair and nervously set up stage right, taking care not to get in the way of 'em setting up.

The gig was rammed; the new stuff went down real well, with people singing along and at times just a bundle of filthy bodies and dreads blasting along to the set: I knew I was witnessing something special. They played some of the old stuff but the addition of the keyboard player added a new dimension. I'd seen Killing Joke on the 'Nighttime' tour earlier that year which was great but this was way more up close and personal: I'd got an ace spot to watch it all kick off. The set ended after a couple of encores, I thanked the band and said I'd send 'em a copy when I'd got back. Me and Tim cleared off to stay in some punk flat in the last remaining blocks of the Hume flats which was depressing and a bit squalid but definitely a roof to shelter over. With the cider and the journey I drifted off to sleep in my trusty kitbag.

Morning arrived, coffee and toast were made by our hosts (always appreciated) and we made our way over to the bus-station to make the journey home. Once on the Bus, Tim said that was an ace show last night, let's hear what the tape sounded like. I wasn't sure if I had that much battery power left but would give it a go. Tape rewind I pressed play..... We both looked at each other and burst out laughing. I'd been that nervous and pissed, I'd taped some fucking football commentary instead of the gig. Bastard. Well at least I got to see the band at the height of what I consider to be their best record (I was never a fan of *Monolith*). I still laugh at this nowadays but such is life. Fast forward to London Underground, 2009. Amebix were back with Roy Mayorga (from NYC's Nausea) on drums. Amebix'd been gone since the late 1980s but now they were back, mature and still had the same ferocity as their 1985 tour. The backline wasn't bad either. After a few listens I now really like their new record, *Sonic Mass*, and it was great to see 'em back again albeit for a short period. There are not many bands that can take such a long break and return more popular than they were in 1985.

Gords, November, 2014.